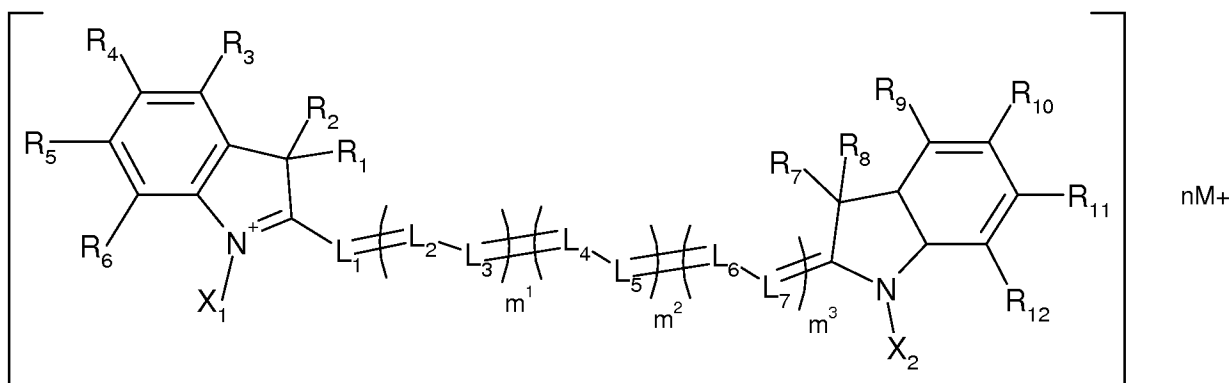


This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of fluorescence imaging, comprising introducing a near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a compound of the formula below or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof into a living body, exposing said body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent ~~A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging and a compound of the following formula or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:~~



wherein

R^1 , R^2 , R^7 , and R^8 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_{10} alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group; or

R^1 and R^2 and/or R^7 and R^8 bind to each other to form a ring;

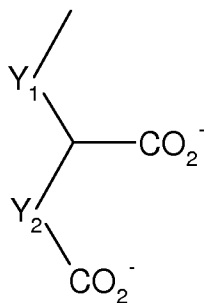
R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} independently represent a hydrogen atom, a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_6 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or

unsubstituted heteroaryl group, a halogen atom, cyano group, carboxyl group, or sulfo group; or

two of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and ~~R^{11}~~ and R^{12} bind to each other to form a ring;

X^2 represents a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_{15} alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group;

X^1 is a group represented by the following formula



wherein

X^1 and X^2 in total have 2 or 4 carboxyl groups;

Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent linking group;

m^1 represents 0 or 1;

m^2 represents 0 or 1;

m^3 represents 0 or 1;

L^1 , L^2 , L^3 , L^4 , L^5 , L^6 , and L^7 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted methine group,

provided that when two or more of the methine groups have substituents, the substituents bind to each other to form a ring;

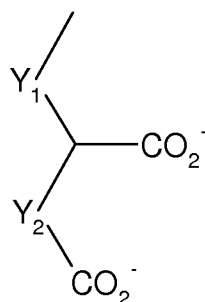
M represents a hydrogen atom, a metal, or a quaternary ammonium salt; and

n represents an integer of 1 to 7 necessary for neutralizing charge.

2. (Currently Amended) The method ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent~~ according to claim 1, wherein in the compound each of m^1 , m^2 , and m^3 is 1.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Currently Amended) The method ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent~~ according to claim 1, wherein in the compound X^1 and X^2 independently represent a group represented by the following formula:



wherein Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent bond.

5. (Currently Amended) The method ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent~~ according to claim 1, wherein in the compound at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 3, wherein in the compound Y_1 represents $-(CH_2)_pCONH-$, wherein p represents an integer of 1 to 4, and Y_2 represents $-(CH_2)-$ or $(CH_2)_2-$.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Currently Amended) The method ~~A method of fluorescence imaging, comprising introducing the near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 1, wherein the contrast agent is introduced into the living body and comprises a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier for diagnostic imaging into a living body, exposing said body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent.~~

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, which is for tumor imaging.

13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, which is for angiography.

14. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 11, near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is injectable distilled water.

15. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 11, near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable

injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is physiological saline.

16. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 11, ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1,~~ wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is Ringer's solution.

17. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 5, ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 5,~~ wherein in the compound at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group.

18. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 5, ~~near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 5,~~ wherein in the compound at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.

19. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the compound Y_1 represents $-(CH_2)_pCONH-$.

20. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the compound p represents an integer of 1 to 4.

21. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the compound Y_2 represents $-(CH_2)-$ or $(CH_2)_2-$.

22. (New) The method of claim 1, which is for tumor imaging.

23. (New) The method of claim 1, which is for angiography.